



CEREBUS

\$2.25 USA • \$3.15 CANADA • £1.40 UK

231
JUN

E X C E R P T

Around Hyères on the coast of Provence the land is time-strewn and memory-worn. Poppies shatter in midsummer ecstasy over the fields; the pines are old and resin-dripped and lanes swoon under the aura of honeysuckle. Dust of the grain steeps the long roads in memory. After a while the way climbs, hangs precariously over much sea and space, is patched to the earth with bright plaster villas swung through blue eternities of sun-tempered air. The land is lone and virginal; here is a rendezvous of weathers. As the way careens up the pink coast at Golf Juan, the world again bears witness to the maps. Brownd people splash themselves with the goodness of life along a shore quietly humming to itself of the imperishability of its dusks and the unpregnability of its noons — weather designed to conserve the aspirations of many people who had thought all along that the first objective of life was to die efficiently. Cosmic intent takes a new breath: good wine and good ways and the acceptance of days. Juan-les-Pins and Antibes come down to earth with bright prescriptions for pleasure and formulas of beauty which save the mind much wear and tear of inventing further *raison d'être*. Here people from many countries rest their souls amidst the colorful immaculacies of the meticulous paradise from St-Raphaël to Nice.

Nice Christian people.

There was no telling what made the garden the way it was. There were olive trees with roots in Palestine and ferns from Paul Rousseau and paths keeping tryst under the pines and eucalyptus. This was a blessed world and they were fine healthy solvent people; for its great beneficence, they gave voluble thanks to the social structure.

"Isn't it wonderful that people invented this?"

"Isn't it swell that we have been thus enabled —?"

"I am so glad that Jayce learned about France in his geography —"

"— and from friends at college."

Agreeing that the perspicacity of their acumen and the poesies of their aspirations had indeed richly endowed life, they blessed themselves and thanked each other and gave great credit to Harvard and Yale. Not one remembered to thank the Lord.

Last issue's excerpt: *Esquire*, August 1994
Norman Mailer, "Madonna Like a Lady"

This issue's excerpt: Zelda Fitzgerald
Other Names for Roses

This concludes the "Excerpts" series.

CEREBUS

NO. 231

JUNE 1998

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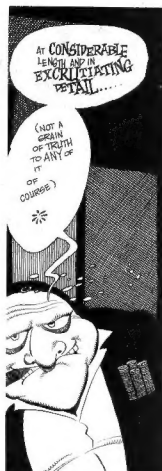
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RICK'S STORY

(Cerebus 220
to Cerebus 231)

MONTHLY
ALL CONTENTS
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EPILOGUE





HURLED
IT AT
BEULAH

AND
SAID:

"AND YOU (MY DEAR)
ARE WELCOME TO FIND
SUITABLE ACCOMMODATION
FOR THAT AND THE
TATTERED REMAINS
OF MY LOVE FOR
YOU..."

"ANYWHERE
ON YOUR PHYSICAL
PERSON."

"WHERE
THE SUN"

"DOES"

"NOT SHINE"

"SHINE."

Flick

THUS
BRINGING A
WHOLE NEW
DIMENSION
OF MEANING
TO THE PHRASE
THICE

"FREEDOM
OF CHOICE"



WHEREU PON!

BEAR AND I (HAVING RECOGNIZED THE
INHERENT SUPERIORITY OF
THE MASCULINE THICE GENDER)...
...WE WOULD CALL
RAN AWAY...

...AS FAST THICE AS OUR LITTLE
LEGS WOULD CARRY US... EVEN
AS BEULAH-BUTT AND ZIG-PIG
LAUNCHED EVERY PROJECTILE-
SIZED *Object* IN THE TANKER
IN THE DIRECTION OF OUR
THICE FLEEING FORMS...

(FOR LUNARITY FOR
US, THICE THEY BOTH
THROW LIKE GIRLS)



WHEREU PON!

HAVING ADJOURNED TO THE
NEAREST INEBRERY TO SAVOUR
OUR VICTORY AND RHETORICAL OUR
NEWLY-WON *Liberte* FROM
THE UNFAIRER SEX

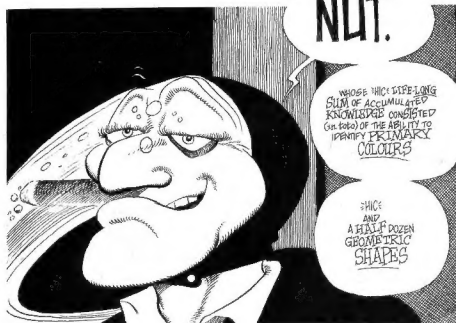
WHOM

DO YOU SUPPOSE
WE SHOULD HAPPEN
ACROSS BUT...

but...

now, he
was HERE
just a
MIN-THICE
ago.







SO!

...I'LL HAVE
A WINTAVACALL
LARGE STOUT

UGH!
AN I'LL AVEA
LARGE
STOUTAZ
WELL...

AND I SHALL
HAVE A SMALL
BOWL of ~~the~~ BOURBON

IN WHICH TO
DIP MY ~~the~~
WINNINGS

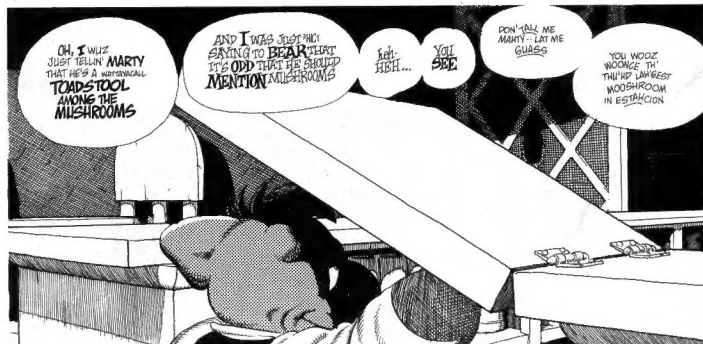
COMIN'
RIGHT
UP!



YOU SEE?
I TOLD YOU
THICK
HE NEVER
LEFT...

THAT'S 'CAUSE
HE'S THE ONLY
ONE OF US WITH
WINTAVACALL
A LICK OF COMMON
GENE

WHAT'RE YOU
TWO WHISPERIN'
ABOUT, THEN?



OH, I WULZ
JUST TELLIN' MARTY
THAT HE'S A WINTAVACALL
TOADSTOOL
AMONG THE
MUSHROOMS

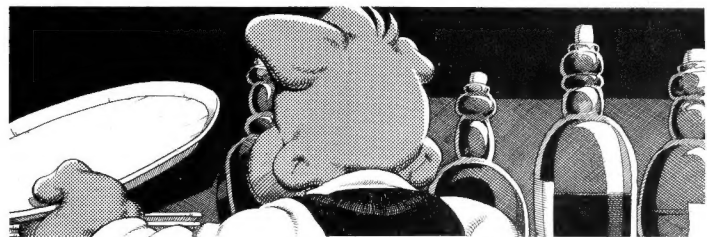
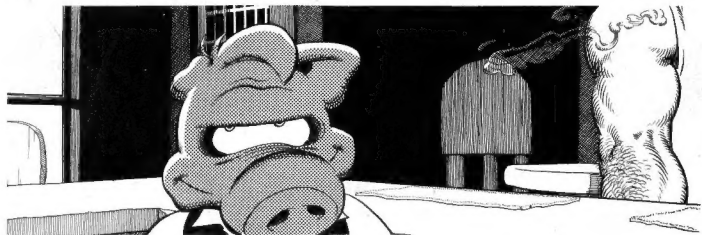
AND I WAS JUST TRYIN'
SAYIN' TO BEAR THAT
IT'S ODD THAT HE SHOULD
MENTION MUSHROOMS

HEH...
HEH...

YOU
SEE

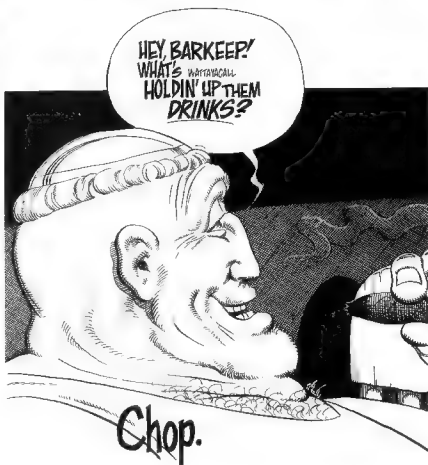
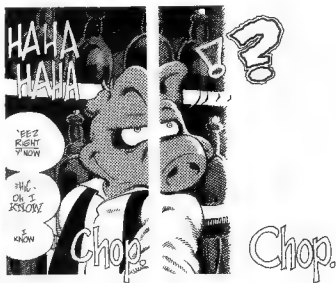
DON'T TELL ME
MARTY - I'VE
GUESSED

YOU WOOLZ
WOONCE TH'
THU'RD LARGEST
MOOSHROOM
IN ESTACION







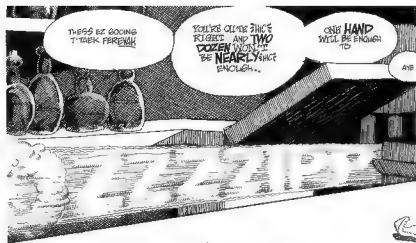




KEEP YER SHIRT ON

CEREBRUS HAS ONLY GOT WATYVACHU TWO HANDS

Chop. Chop. Chop.



THESS EZ GOING T'BACK FRESH

YOU'RE OLDER THAN EIGHT AND TWO DOZEN WATYVACHU BE NEARLY AS MUCH ENOUGH...

ONE HAND WILL BE ENOUGH TO

AYE

Chop. Chop.



SO? WE'VE JUST WATYVACHU MAKE EACH ONE WORTH TEN...

YES! THAT'S SPLENDID

AYE! DARTELL WATYVACHU



Chop.

Chop.

Chop.

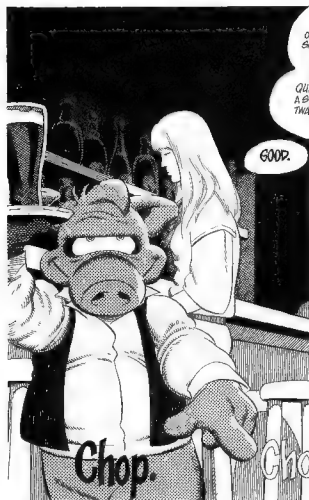
Chop.

NO ONE

WAS. THAT WON'T WORK EITHER

YER RIGHT, I WATYVACHU BET TEN, YOU BET TWENTY

AYE



I'LL CHOP SOON OOH THAM OOP ENTA SMOOLAH BITE AYE...? 'AUF A BLAACE EZ TAN

QUANTUM OOH A BLAACE EZ TWANTY FIVE

GOOD.



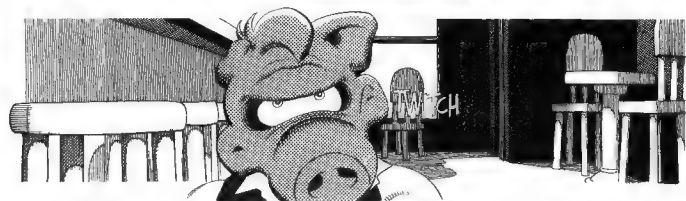
ONE LARGE STOUT.

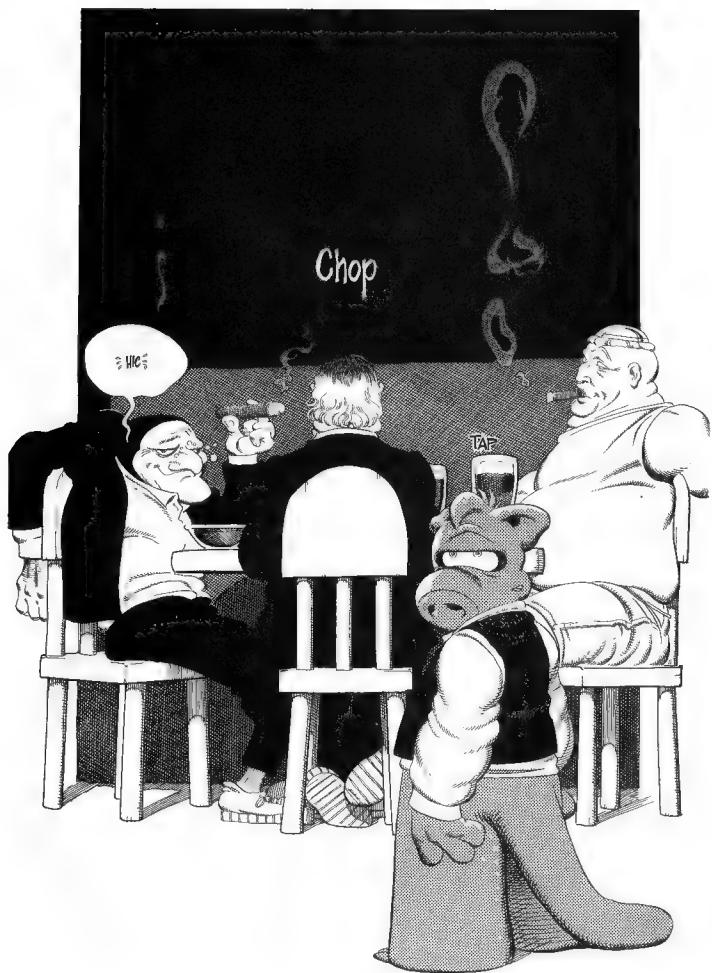
TA

Chop.

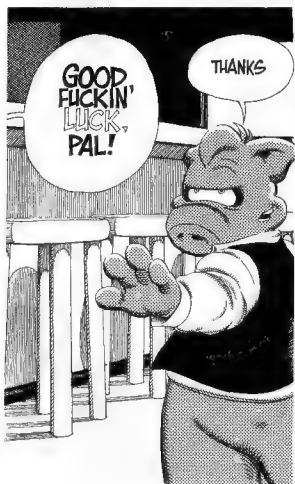
HAHAHA
HAHAHA

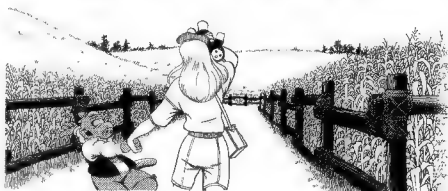
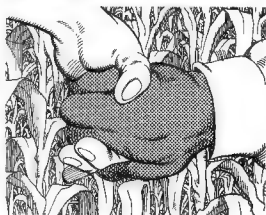
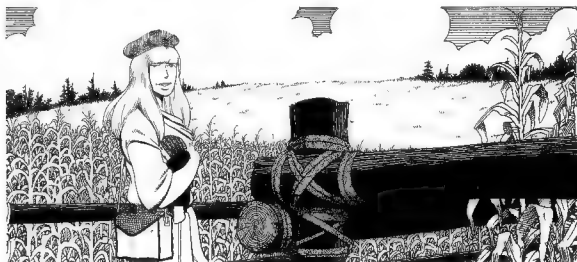
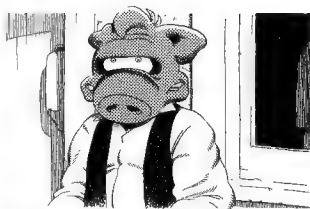












MAMA'S BOY

Just spoke to my Dad to set up a dinner date for Tuesday and told him that I had finally gotten to this part of the "Mama's Boy" series.

"Oh, boy," he laughed. "This is the one she's been dreading."

"Well, you can tell her that she hasn't any reason to dread it. I think she'll like it. I think you both will."

Even over the phone, I could tell that he was unconvinced.

"I'm going to give her an advance copy and tell her that she's more than welcome to add anything to it that she wants. I'll run it in italics so everyone knows what part is me and what part is her."

He laughed again. "Can she take stuff out?" Razor-sharp as always.

I laughed right back. "I'm open to negotiation. I'll certainly be open to paraphrasing the way I said something. We'll treat it as if I'm a book author and she's my editor. We'll...negotiate."

(This proved, as I hoped it would, unnecessary.)

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for waiting. The conclusion of the "Mama's Boy" series of essays:

Okay. My Mum.

My mother is perfect. And I say that not in any sentimental fashion but rather as a statement of widely accepted fact. Widely accepted by everyone except my mother, that is.

She tries. As best I can sum up my mother's view of herself, that would be it. She tries. "I try," I can hear her say — high note on the "I" musically plummeting to the "try."

This infuriates my father.

I really hate to bring Dad into this because it would be nice to just talk about my mother here, but they really have one of those "old-fashioned," "till death do us part" marriages that were so much the rule for centuries and have only, in the last few decades, shown indications of possible inclusion on the endangered species list. It infuriates my father that my mother can't acknowledge that she is perfect (I think) for the exact reason that my father is the most critical person that I know, a born fault-finder who has honed his critical faculties to a razor sharpness. Bluntly put, my father scares the shit out of everyone he has a conversation with. You know when I write about something that you think you have a very clearly defined opinion about, and by the time you're done reading it you feel like a fool because I've just made mincemeat of your opinion in a few pithy paragraphs? I got that from my Dad. Not so much genetically (I don't think) as from spending the first two decades of my life wading around in the mincemeat of what used to be my opinions, starting to build a philosophy around the few un-minced opinions

I had managed to defend successfully against my father's samurai scalpel of rhetorical precision (as it were).

So, when my Dad is of the unshakeable conviction that my mother is perfect, you can be certain that it is not a conclusion arrived at lightly, nor that prodigious energies have not been expended in the last fifty or so years in finding a weak link, an Achilles' Heel or a previously overlooked skeleton in one of my mother's immaculately maintained closets.

My personal opinion is that my father is infuriated by mother's failure to acknowledge her own perfection, because to do so would make her an "egotist" and, ergo, not perfect. Even repeated attempts to retrench his position and to get her to acknowledge that she is a "good" person have met with repeated failure. The impasse reasserts itself every time that I have occasion to listen to them revive the argument. My father tells my mother she is a good person. My mother says she tries. My father says there is no "try" about it. She is a good person. My mother says she tries. My father says, "Horseshit" ("horseshit" is a favourite expression of my Dad's at the crux of any argument) and challenges my mother to come up with anything about herself which is not "good." My mother quite cheerfully offers up any one of a number of character traits about herself that she is genuinely concerned about, that she is meditatively self-critical about. She starts to, anyway, but my Dad will have none of it, and they reach the aforementioned impasse — my mother discussing what to her is a stubborn and ineradicable stain in the fabric of her life and my father dismissing it as an inconsequential piece of lint. *Imaginary* lint.

Fifty years of this. The mind boggles.

Anyway, some months ago I was having dinner with my parents and mentioned to my mother that one of the wisest — make that Wisest things — she ever said to me about being a parent was: "You start off winning all the battles, and then you win some of the battles and lose some, and you end by losing all of the battles." That is, with your kids. Even as I type it here for the first time, I am drawn to the term "battles" and the implied acknowledgement that the parent/child relationship does constitute warfare of a sort, an adversarial relationship on a very small scale. A canvas of harmony and progress punctuated with eruptions of the conflict never far below the surface. Of course, the real Wisdom of it, to me, is the acknowledgement that the ultimate goal is to "lose" the war. Particularly in the context of this series of essays, it seems to me to be a blueprint for *not* creating a "mama's boy," but, rather, creating an autonomous man.

I asked her if she had come up with the distillation herself or if she had read it somewhere. No, it was her very own.

I had suspected as much, but it was nice to have it confirmed.

The ensuing discussion concerned itself with the middle bit, that is, picking the battles you are going to win

and picking the battles that you have decided to lose. No surprise that this was arrived at through extended discussions behind closed doors between Mum and Dad, weighing the pros and cons, trying to arrive at a measured and temperate verdict on the *sujet du jour*. I expressed sympathy at that point. Sympathy not a little marked with admiration for a willingness to take on the gruelling process of raising a child. I have more than enough to handle in my own life, drawing distinctions between what I will and won't allow *myself* to do or not do. Even imagining myself in the situation of having to make those calls for someone else — well, frankly, I *can't* imagine it.

"Well," my mother said with an amused twinkle in her eye, "I was fortunate that you kids didn't push me too far."

The discussion continued at that point, but I was having difficulty concentrating, I admit. Interior thought processes were going on: considering *why* it was that my sister and I *hadn't* pushed my parents too far. Growing up in the late sixties and early seventies with youthful rebellion in the air, we were both very far from rebellious by nature. It seemed to me as I considered it that the resilience implied by knowing that they were going to — had decided they *had* to — "win some of the battles and lose some, and end up losing all of the battles" meant that my parents were very difficult to rebel against. Examples leapt to mind. I could have shoulder-length hair, but I had to keep it clean. My room could be as messy as I wanted, but I had to keep the door closed. There was so much "give," so many concessions to my (and my sister's) individuality and autonomy, that the battles, when and where they came, hinged on distinctions between right and wrong. If we were not allowed to do something, it was because it was wrong in my parents' eyes. A flat "no" was so unusual that I always figured there was a good reason for it. I certainly never had anything to contribute to the discussion at school when friends would talk about what assholes their parents were.

Simultaneous with this, my father mentioned something about our family discussions around the dinner table. That set off a new round of interior thought processes which made concentration even more difficult. I had forgotten the old family discussions, can't remember a single one specifically, but I did remember the sensation of it. One minute it was 5:30, and the next minute it was 8:30 or 9:00. Somewhere in there the four of us had sliced and diced and fine-tuned and poked and prodded some ostensibly innocuous subject which had been raised in passing, just a stray remark, until there was no aspect of it that had been untouched, it seemed. The launch point was usually when my Dad would say, "Let me play devil's advocate..." and would proceed to adopt a completely contrary stance to accepted and conventional wisdom. It was immaterial whether he believed it or not; the point was the intellectual challenge of trying to prove him wrong.

Dragging myself back to my mother's Wisdom, I asked if they remembered any particular battles with me that they couldn't decide whether to win or lose. I was surprised, but I shouldn't have been.

Comic books.

I'm pleased to say that I am not one of the legion of comic-book people who bears the scar of "my mother threw out my comic books." Maybe that's why I can be a little more sympathetic to a sensibility that would find it necessary at some point. Again, my interior thought processes went off on another trajectory, really seeing the comic-book childhood from a parent's side of things. "My mother threw out my comic books." It's almost always the mother. You don't hear: "My parents threw out my comic books" or "My Dad threw out my comic books." Since my thoughts were largely focused on the maternal side of reality, a new insight popped into my head. Fire hazard. Fire safety brochures with their list of no-nos. One of which is to dispose of old newspapers and magazines. I had to smile at that. Why not just come home and say, "Hey, Mom! Look at this great box of oily rags that Tommy gave me! Now I've got two thousand oily rags down in the basement instead of one thousand! Isn't that great?" This was followed by another quick insight — the badly socialized childhood of the comic-book fan. When you're getting to the age when you're supposed to be getting interested in girls, getting ready for marriage and parenthood, it's not hard to see how a mother could get worried about you spending Friday and Saturday night sitting in the basement reindexing your *Fantastic Four* collection.

For those of us who got hit hard with the "comic-book flu," it's very difficult to see how really, really unnatural it is. When I was ten or eleven, there were about a half-dozen kids in the neighbourhood who were collecting comic books. By the time I was thirteen I was the only one. I can certainly understand how it would provide my parents with no end of "behind closed doors" conversation fodder. Comic books were not a hobby of mine. A hobby you could understand. If I went out on dates and hung around with friends and spent a couple of nights or the occasional weekend in the basement, that would be one thing. But comic books were all that I was genuinely interested in, all that I thought about, all that I did. On the pro side of the discussion? Well, he's not really hurting anybody — at least he isn't mixed up with drugs or getting himself arrested. On the con side? Jesus, what *is* it with that boy? Is he *ever* going to grow out of it?

Well, not so far. But I guess there's always hope.

It was really only because my mother is and was perfect, I think, that I was able to see the down side of maternalism clearly enough to come up with the Cirinists and, tangentially, the Kevillists. It was only because she is and was such a good person that false matriarchal notes and excesses of feminism stood out, by contrast, for me as they began to multiply and contradict each other without a single voice being raised in opposition. It was only because she did try, because she does try, and because she will try until her dying breath — seeing the other side of the argument, always seeking the elusive middle course between extremes in the interest of everyone being included — that adversarial maternalism and adversarial feminism had me muttering "horseshit" under my breath, and then out loud and in print some time before I was aware that anyone else had seen that something was not kosher in Milwaukee.

My mother never "bought into" the idea of day-care, as an example. It tugged on her heart strings — even the two-decades old memory of it tugs on her heart strings — to see a neighbour's children at pre-school age bundled up in snowsuits climbing over the fence to go to another neighbour's house to be minded for the day, well...

To my mother there was just something wrong about that. Pre-school children should get up in the morning and be able to scuff around the house in slippers and py-jamas, watch cartoons, read comic books, play with their toys. And that was definitely the life that my sister and I had.

Of course, my mother had no intention of being just a housewife and mother. She firmly intended to go back to work once my sister and I were in school, and she did so. People who are perfect, or good, or who try (just to cover all the bases) to see the elusive middle course, in my experience, tend to luck into ideal situations to a greater extent than those folks who don't have the aforementioned attributes. My mother ended up getting a job as a school secretary, which became her career for more than thirty years. So profound (I don't use the term lightly), so profound an impact did she have on the staff and students at each of the three schools she worked at that the flood — flood — of written tributes from her co-workers on the occasion of her retirement was more than a little overwhelming for someone (God bless her) whose self-assessment has never risen much above "I try." The outpouring of goodwill dwarfed the previous high watermark of acknowledgement — when she had been awarded Kitchener-Waterloo Oktoberfest Women's Committee Woman of the Year honours in 1980. Many, many anecdotes of my mother having said to someone the right thing at the right time, which they had never forgotten and which had comforted them, motivated them or reassured them in a moment of despair, anxiety, or apprehension. So many lives that she touched, so many people she affected so deeply and upon whom she made such a lasting impression just by being who she is — just by "trying."

And none of this, no part of her career, was at the expense of her family. Far from it. As a school secretary,

her vacations were the same as her children's vacations. For all intents and purposes, my sister and I had a full-time mother. When we were home before 9 a.m. and after 4 p.m., she was home. When we were home for a week, she was home for a week. When we were home for two months in the summer, she was home for two months in the summer. It was an ideal situation all the way around. Ideal for my mother, ideal for her co-workers, ideal for her family. How many jobs are there for a wife and mother of which that can truly be said? Very, very few, I would maintain.

So when I write about Cirinists and Kevillists, the matriarchy and feminism, I write from a singular vantage point of having seen and having been a product of the perfect balance of each — genuinely effective Motherhood and genuinely effective Feminism, where neither effectiveness was diminished by the other.

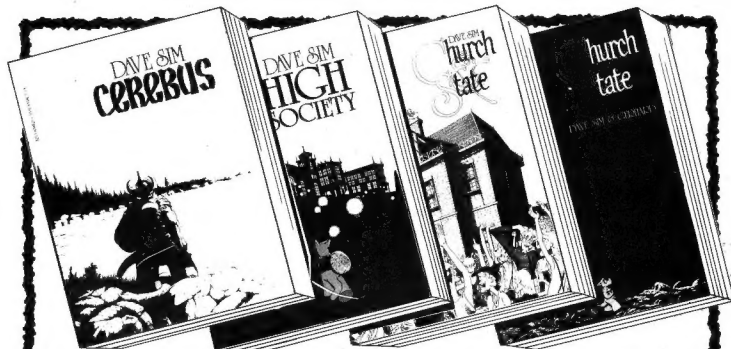
Outside of the fixed parameters of my own mother's accomplishment, everything, in my view, gets a little skewed (to say the least). To even begin to address the singularity of my experience is to introduce large questions. Was I *privileged* to have a mother who struck the right balance? Is having a full-time mother a *privilege*? Is it a *right*? The distance between the two terms could fill many, many volumes of hair-splitting distinctions and still arrive at no proper conclusion, I think. There is no easy solution and no apparent "formula" which can be extrapolated. Every mother should get a job in the public school system if she wants to work and have her job not be at her family's or her own expense? The corporate world should rearrange itself so that positions held by mothers have exactly the work/vacation ratio and parameters of the school year? The former is impossible and the latter (I'm sure we can all agree) extremely unlikely.

Anyway, my mother pulled it off. And made it look easy.

I just thought that all of you...and she...should know that that is what I believe.

I love you, Mum. Thanks.





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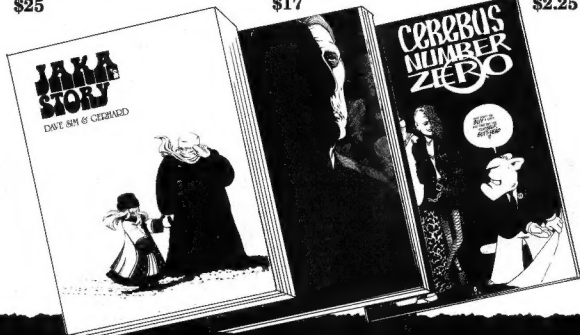
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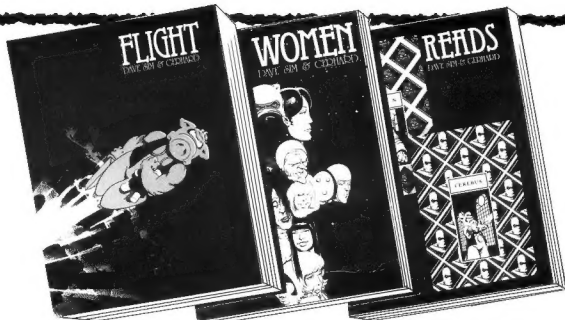
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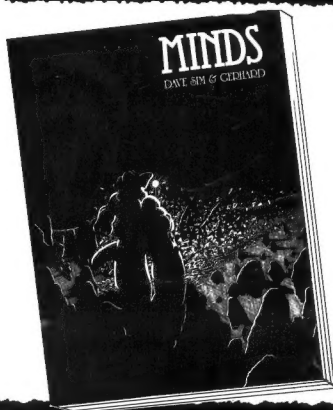
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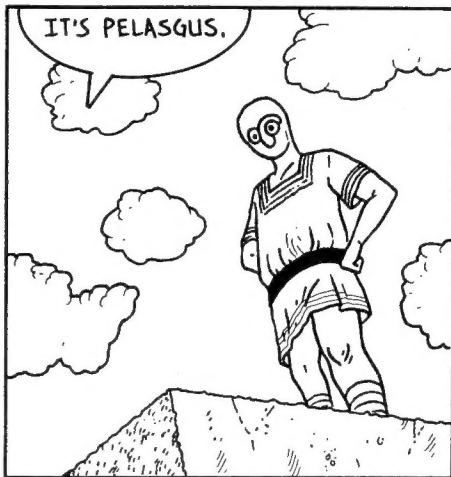
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PELASGUS



FIRST ISSUE

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